On Stories: Tolkien and fictional worlds

Maria do Rosário MONTEIRO
CHAM, FCSH, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa
E-mail rosariomonteiro@fcsh.unl.pt
ORCID: 0000-0001-6214-5975

Abstract

This chapter will deal with Tolkien's essay "On Fairy-Stories" (1983d). Two main ideas will guide the text. To prove how in the first half of the 20th century, in an academic scenario dominated by the discussion of who was worth to be included in the novel "Great tradition", Tolkien produced an essay on *a genre unworthy of any serious attention*, which however became itself an unavoidable source for students and researchers of literature in the last century. The other main idea is to prove that "On Fairy-Stories" changed forever the way fantasy was understood (as happened with the essay "Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics" (1983a), anticipating much of what is now discussed in narratology: *storyworlds* and *fiction worlds*. Tolkien did not have at his disposal the contemporary theoretical vocabulary but he definitely launched the cornerstones for contemporary narrative study that came to be known as the "narrative turn" that took form in the 1990s with critics as Umberto Eco (1990), Lubomír Doležel (1998), Thomas Pavel (1986, 1988), and Marie-Laure Ryan (1992).

Keywords: Tolkien, On Fairy-Stories, Fictional worlds, narrative theory

Syne they came to a garden green,
And she pu'd an apple frae a tree:
'Take this for thy wages, true Thomas;
It will give thee the tongue that can never lee.'
Thomas the Rhymer

1. Introduction

As with most of Tolkien literary and theoretical production, the essay "On Fairy-Stories" has a long history of versions, revisions and restructurations. In the 1983 edition, Christopher Tolkien states that the first published edition was in 1947 (C. S. Lewis, 1947), re-edited in 1964, and the 1983 edition had only minor corrections (p. 3). Those who know of Tolkien's obsession with perfection[1], widely confirmed by *The History of Middle-Earth* (1983-1996), and the ever-growing critical editions[2], can only expect to also find a similar pattern regarding "On Fairy-Stories". The 1947 version is a substantial restructuration of Tolkien's lecture presented on March 8, 1939, in the annual "Andrew Lang Lecture", held in St. Andrew University, Scotland[3]. Up until now the actual content of Tolkien's lecture remains unknown, for no records of it have been found (yet) and the information provided by the newspapers does not shed light on it (Tolkien, 2014, pp. 159-169). Flieger and Anderson worked on two manuscript versions (A and B), assuming version A as the research basis for the lecture. They also present a valuable lengthy bibliography that Tolkien quoted or read during the preparation of the lecture (2014, pp. 306-311)[4]

In 1939, Tolkien was having difficulty in writing a sequel for *The Hobbit* (1983b). His relation with the published book followed the pattern of the perfectionist Lewis described. It is accurate to say that Tolkien never overcame a certain dissatisfaction with the way *The Hobbit* conditioned his literary career, namely the writing and publication of *The Silmarillion* (1983e) by introducing a novel/sequel, *The Lord of the Rings*

[1] The most cited reference to Tolkien's obsession with perfection was made, according to Carpenter, by C. S. Lewis: "His standard of self-criticism was high and the mere suggestion of publication usually set him upon a revision, in the course of which so many new ideas occurred to him that where his friends had hoped for the final text of an old work they actually got the first draft of a new one." (1978, p. 143) However, Carpenter does not indicate the quotation source, for reasons he explains (pp. 275-278). In Lewis *Letters*, one finds the following statements: "Tolkien […] is most important. *The Hobbit* is merely the *adaptation to children* of part of a huge private mythology of a most serious kind: the whole cosmic struggle as he sees it but mediated through an imaginary world. *The Hobbit*'s successor, which will soon be finished, will reveal this more clearly. Private worlds have hitherto been mainly the work of decadents or, at least, mere aesthetes. This is the private world of a Christian. He is a very great man. His published works (both imaginative & scholarly) ought to fill a shelf by now: but he his one of those people who is never satisfied with a MS. The mere suggestion of publication provokes the reply 'Yes. I'll just look through it and give it a few finishing touches' - wh. means that he really begins the whole thing over again." (1988, p. 376).

[2] Just two examples: *On Fairy Stories* (Tolkien, 2014) or *A Secret Vice* (Tolkien, 2016).

[3] See Michelson (2012) and Flieger & Anderson (2014a) who provide crucial information.

[4] A specific reference to this bibliographic list will be presented further on.

(2005, 1st ed. 1954-1955), that had to connect both with a book written for children and the mythological body[5]. Ironically, *The Lord of the Rings* became a landmark in fantasy literature. The masterpiece took him seventeen years to write, demanding uncountable revisions both to the novel and to *The Silmarillion*, in order to avoid any discrepancy or inaccuracy in the whole body of Middle Earth fictional world (Tolkien, 1981a, p. 2016). The initial project was only (partially) completed with Christopher's posthumous edition of *The Silmarillion*[6], but by 1951 Tolkien could express a global image of his project and its internal coherence:

> I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story – the larger founded on the lesser in contact with the earth, the lesser drawing splendour from the vast backcloths […] Of course, such an overweening purpose did not develop all at once. The mere stories were the thing. They arose in my mind as 'given things', and as they came, separately, so too the links grew. […] *The Hobbit* […] was quite independently conceived: I did not know as I began it that it belonged. But it proved to be the discovery of the completion of the whole, its mode of descent to earth, and merging into history. As the high Legends of the beginning are supposed to look at things through Elvish minds, so the middle tale of the Hobbit takes a virtually human point of view – and the last tale blends them. (Tolkien, 1981a, pp. 144-145)[7]

Tolkien's research for the Andrew Lang Lecture and its writing were done in a period when Tolkien was struggling with *The Lord of the Rings* intended as a sequel for *The Hobbit* (1981a, pp. 40-42). He had, according to Flieger and Anderson, three months to research and write the lecture (Tolkien, p. 128).

Reading "On Fairy-Stories", one cannot miss the implied criticism that Tolkien does to *The Hobbit*, nor the defence of Fairy-Stories being adult reading as justification for the sequel being "darker".

However, the essay is much more than that: it is a theoretical essay on fantasy at the same level that "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics" is a landmark on the medieval poem criticism[8]. It is this researcher's opinion that long before the "narrative turn" (Kreiswirth, 2005; Ryan, 2015b, p. 11) Tolkien made it, using the available terminology and adapting other so that the outcome is a quite *avant la lettre* essay on narrative as recent terminology defines it.

This chapter, divided into two parts, begins by trying to demystify the all too frequent interpretation of "On Fairy-Stories" as a personal and biographical text - responsible for the somewhat light use of the theoretical dimension. The second part will focus on Tolkien's anticipation of "the narrative turn". It will deal with the creation of fictional worlds and justification of the now called reader's natural narrative immersion in the fictional world as a necessary way to achieve one of literature main objectives: to widen the ever-increasing strict notion of consensual reality, in itself a functional narrative created and shared within cultural communities.

2. Is "On Fairy-Stories" Tolkien's fiction self-justifying text?

The answer is "No"! Tolkien disliked allegory; the author of this chapter has the same feeling for pseudo-literary interpretations based on the author's biography or statements concerning his personal interpretation of his works[9]. This was the usual practice, based on the conception of literature being a mimetic creation[10]. This is unacceptable as critical practice since the second half of the 20th century. It is hard to forget Barthes' edit of "the author's death":

[5] Tolkien's relation with *The Hobbit* was always one of mixed feelings. He clearly welcomed the extra income, but mostly he felt it was almost an "accident" that had nothing to do with what he really wanted to publish: *The Silmarillion* (1983e). In 1938 he struggles with the request to write a "never intended" sequel (Tolkien, 1981b, p. 38) and twenty two years later, "peace" with the first novel was not solved (Tolkien, 1981b, pp. 218, 297-298, 310). Particularly interesting is Tolkien's long letter to W. H. Auden (1981b, pp. 211-217).

[6] *The Silmarillion* edited in 1983 does not wholly corresponds to what Tolkien had in mind. It is the outcome of Christopher Tolkien and Guy Gavriel Kay's edition and selection of parts of Tolkien's texts. The editors' ignored then the extent of Tolkien's work, which can only be glimpsed with the publication of *The History of Middle Earth*. For a possible more accurate picture of what Tolkien had in mind, had he lived to see it published, please refer to Noad's "On the Construction of "The Silmarillion" (2000).

[7] Tolkien is here considering the temporal link of the fictional project, the evolution of Middle-Earth plot: *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

[8] "Next after is essay on *"Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics", "On Fairy-Stories" is [Tolkien's] most reprinted critical essay, and like the *Beowulf* essay it is a landmark in its field." (Flieger & Anderson, 2014b, p. 9).

[9] A clear example of this kind of interpretation centred in Tolkien's opinions expressed in some of his letters is the debate on whether Tolkien's mythology is a Christian or a pagan one (Curry, 1998; Pearce, 1998). Tolkien's interpretations of his own work are irrelevant for the reader and depend on the circumstances that determined his statements. He was "a complex individual […] a man deeply conflicted, balancing faith against experience, and orthodoxy against an inner perception that broke the veil and reached the other side of the visible world" (Flieger, 2017, p. 30). This said his mythology is neither Christian nor Nordic, nor Celtic: it is a mixing of several sources developed, revised and restructured during a lifetime. It is a rich and unique fictional world.

[10] For a detailed analysis of traditional interpretations of literary works until the 1980's see Doležel (1998, 2010).

> We know now that a text consists not of a line of words, releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God), but of a multi-dimensional space in which are married and contested several writings, none of which is original: the text is a fabric of quotations, resulting from a thousand sources of culture. (Barthes, 1989, pp. 52-53)

Barthes makes narrative wholly dependent on language, while the narrative turn centres in the story as a cognitive construct (Ryan, 2015b, p. 11). The "author's death" cannot be assumed as dogma, as structuralism did, replacing him by a fictional character: the implied author; whose usefulness is highly debatable[11].

Indeed, Tolkien does not make it easy to avoid the connection to the biographical dimension:

> Faërie is a perilous land, and in it are pitfalls for the unwary and dungeons for the overbold. […] I have been a lover of fairy-stories since I learned to read, and have at times thought about them. […] I have been hardly more than a wandering explorer (or trespasser) in the land, full of wonder but not of information. (Tolkien, 1983d, p. 109)[12]

These sentences create in the reader the expectation of a more literary text, almost a public confession of feelings and opinions instead of an objective and straightforward text. However, one must not forget that, in 1939, to talk about fairy-stories was stepping into a field that, for the vast majority of adult readers and scholars, was necessarily a minor literature, suitable for children, a subject unworthy of an Oxfordian scholar.

However, Tolkien's public was probably quite heterogeneous but also particular:

> Of lesser concern than the primary topic, but nevertheless a circumstance which Tolkien went out of his way to address, was the special nature of his audience. Not only could it be expected to be familiar with Andrew Lang and with fairy-stories, it was presumably and preponderantly Scottish. Tolkien was well aware that Scotland, an indigenously Celtic country, was not just a natural home of the folk and fairy lore traditionally associated with the Celts, but had been for many years a locus for research into the subject. (Flieger & Anderson, 2014a, p. 130)

So far, the original text that Tolkien presented has not been found (and in what concerns Tolkien's estate statements regarding unknown texts are extremely delicate). However, reading the references on coeval magazines and newspapers, in the days following the conference, one infers that it concerned mainly with a defence of fairy-stories as a legitimate literary genre, with an escapist function, the insistence on a happy ending and the acceptance of the marvellous and the supernatural (Flieger & Anderson, 2014a, p. 130).

One is then allowed to speculate that, in his lecture, the criticism one finds in the final text (but also in the surviving manuscripts), regarding the adaptation and expurgation of some features so that the final narratives could be suited to children, according to adults' criteria, were probably less violent, and some possibly omitted. After all, Tolkien had been invited because in 1937 he published *The Hobbit*, highly praised by critics and with vast circulation. However, here one finds oneself in the field of speculation.

It is possible that Tolkien followed in 1939 an intelligent and cautious strategy, which did not leave him with a feeling of satisfaction, of closure, in either scientific or personal spheres. As he states in two letters dated October 1938 and February 1939, he was uncomfortable with the idea of writing a sequel for children (1981a, pp. 41-42). And in a 1955 letter to Auden, he somehow confesses the coincidence between his writing block regarding *The Lord of the Rings* with the need to restructure the 1939 lecture so that his ideas concerning this type of narrative became clear in his mind.

> "… I was not prepared to write a 'sequel', in the sense of another children's story. I had been thinking about 'Fairy Stories' and their relation to children – some of the results I put into a lecture at St. Andrews, and eventually enlarged and published in an Essay […]. *As I had expressed the view that the connection in the modern mind between children and 'fairy stories' is false and accidental, and spoils the stories in themselves and for children*, I wanted to try and write one that was not addressed to children at all (as such); also I wanted a large canvas. (1981a, p. 216)[13]

It is undetermined when Tolkien started restructuring the original lecture, but, as Flieger and Anderson (2014a, p. 131) state, this allowed him to use the extensive research started in 1938 and refute the supposed connection between children and fairy tales, considering it a mere misconception.

> Actually, the association of children and fairy-stories is an accident of our domestic history. Fairy-stories have in the modern lettered world been relegated to the 'nursery', as shabby or old-fashioned furniture is relegated to the playroom, primarily because the adults do not want it, and do not mind if it is misused. […] It is true that in recent times fairy-stories have usually been written or 'adapted' for children. […] It is a dangerous process, even when it is necessary. […] Fairy-stories banished in this way, cut off from a full adult art, would in the end be ruined; indeed in so far as they have been so banished, they have been ruined. (1983d, pp. 130-131)

[11] See Eco (1979, 1992a, 1994) and Ryan (2011).

[12] Italics added. Flieger & Anderson give several meanings to the word "Faërie", one being: "used to mean the Otherworld beyond the five senses – a parallel reality tangential in time and space to the ordinary world" (Tolkien, 2014, p. 85). It is this author's conviction that this is the meaning used in the quoted text.

[13] Italics added.

After a lengthy excursus through other subjects, Tolkien returns to the subject of fairy stories and children:

> It is true that the age of childhood-sentiment has produced some delightful books […] of the fairy kind or near to it; but it also produced a dreadful underground of stories written or adapted to what was or is conceived to be the measure of children's minds and needs. The old stories are mollified or bowdlerised, instead of being reserved; the imitations are often merely silly, […]; or patronising; or (deadliest of all) covertly sniggering, with an eye on the other grown-ups present. (1983d, p. 136)

The research Tolkien undertook (2014, pp. 128-130) led him to conclude that Fairy-Stories have their sources in the myths and legends, i. e. share the same ancestry of all other literature that is considered art. This is the cornerstone of Tolkien's argumentation: fairy stories are Literature, Art, and not minor productions. They come from the same "soup" that boils in the cauldron that produces the myths, legends, novels, a myriad of narratives human societies share and to which they continually add new ingredients.

> Speaking of the history of stories and especially of fairy-stories we may say that the Pot of Soup, the Cauldron of Story, has always been boiling, and to it had continually been added new bits, dainty and undainty. (1983d, p. 125)[14]

This statement is reminiscent of Jung's definition of the collective unconscious, one of the authors Tolkien included in his research for the lecture, and possibly in later years too (2014, pp. 129, 170, 307). From this author's point of view, one of the most exceptional contributions that Flieger and Anderson's edition of "On Fairy-Stories" brings is precisely the factual proof that Tolkien studied the work of the Suisse psychoanalyst and incorporated some elements in his vision of the origin not only of mythology but the narrative in general. This proof is something that requires further inquiry and will make possible new interpretations of Tolkien's fictional world, further justifying some already published[15].

Having an in-depth knowledge of medieval literature in several languages and knowing that fairy stories, recovered and recreated by the Romantics, have their origins in the primaeval days of human culture, Tolkien chose for entrance in his text three stanzas from the "Thomas the Rhymer" ballad. The choice was neither innocent nor casual: first because having before him an audience made mainly of Scottish people, Tolkien new the richness of Scottish folklore to which this ballad belongs. Second, the chosen stanzas define the fairy world as a third world, outside the realm of reality, but also the realm of rational thinking and the ego.

> O see ye not yon narrow road
> So thick beset wi' thorns and briers?
> That is the path of Righteousness,
> Though after it but few inquires.
> And see ye not yon braid, braid road
> That lies across the lily leven?
> That is the path of Wickedness,
> Though some call it the Road to Heaven.
> And see ye not yon bonny road
> That winds about yon fernie brae?
> That is the road to fair Elfland,
> Where thou and I this night maun gae. (1983d, p. 110)

It is his conviction on the ancestry of fairy stories, of its origin being the "Cauldron of stories" that allows Tolkien to state one of the most important assertions of the essay:

> If fairy-story as a kind is worth reading at all it is worthy to be written for and read by adults. *They will, of course, put more in and get more out* than children can. […] if written with art, the prime value of fairy-stories will simply be that value which, as literature, they share with other literary forms. (1983d, p. 137)[16]

Tolkien is clearly aware of a fact today assumed as common knowledge that the process of reading is one of cooperation between author, text and reader, the construction of a web of multiple intertextualities brought into the text by both author and reader, responsible for making each reading of a narrative a co-creation unique and unrepeatable by the same participants. No reader interprets the same text twice in the same way just as the same river water will not pass twice under the same bridge. The narrative/bridge is the same, yet the reader has evolved, became somebody different.

The undervaluation of fairy stories is the outcome of a particular culture, the Western one, produced by the changes of the *Weltanschauung* that started in the end of the Middle- Ages and the beginning of Modern times, a process accelerated by the 19th-century positivism. These changes strengthened the cleavage between the cultural elites and the

[14] It is worth notice that Tolkien's borrows the term "soup" from an author whose theories he contests, George Weber Dasent (1859, p. XVIII), and by adding the term cauldron immediately turns the "soup" into the product of the celebrated Celtic cauldron of Rebirth, the *Pair Dadeni*.

[15] During the many years I have been studying Tolkien's fictional world, I have acknowledge the feeling that Jung's theory was one of the many elements in Middle Earth background, though I never got the change, until recently, of proving my suspicion. These had already been stated by Timothy O'Neill (1980, p. 160). For an analysis of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Ring* and other narratives, exploring the use of symbology and Jungian psychology see Monteiro (1992, 1993, 1997, 2000, 2010, 2014, 2015).

[16] Italics added

popular classes, between the opinion makers and those still in connection with the oral tradition, birthplace of myths and legends.

Tolkien knows he is not alone in this interpretation. One may compare the following statement:

> It seems to become fashionable soon after the great voyages had begun to make the world seem too narrow to hold both men and elves; when the magic land of Hy Breasail in the West had become the mere Brazils, the land of red-eyed-wood. (1983d, p. 111)

With this excerpt from Lewis' "New learning and New Ignorance":

> By reducing Nature to her mathematical elements it substituted a mechanical for a genial or animistic conception of the universe. The world was emptied, first of her indwelling spirits, then of her occult sympathies and antipathies, finally of her colours, smells, and tastes. […] The result was dualism rather than materialism. The mind on whose ideal constructions the whole method depended, stood over against its object in ever sharper dissimilarity. Man with his new powers became rich like Midas but all that he touched had gone dead and cold. This process, slowly working, ensured during the next century the loss of the old mythical imagination: the conceit, and later the personified abstraction, takes its place. Later still, as a desperate attempt to bridge a gulf which begins to be found intolerable, we have the Nature poetry of the Romantics. (C. S. Lewis, 1973, pp. 3-4)

Lewis' conception is based on his discussions with Owen Barfield, possibly during the Inklings meetings, being both aware of the semantic change in words meanings and consequently in the way the world is perceived, as Flieger explains[17]:

> [The] felt unity between man and his world gave his language a similar "ancient semantic unity", a fusion of related meanings within one word. Every word had an "outside" and an "inside", the concrete referent with related meanings that have since been abstracted from it […]. Early language, describing a world perceptibly more alive and immediate than the one we know, was by its nature rich in what we would now call figures of speech, poetic diction. We mean by that words consciously used as metaphors to enhance meaning, but for the original speakers this was the only language available. All diction was poetic. […] such language would have been for its speakers, as ours is for us, the agent as well as the medium of perception, creating reality as it described it. And that reality must have been, by the very nature of the words used, a different reality from the one we know. The development away from the concrete to the abstract, "from homogeneity towards dissociation and multiplicity," has affected not only language, but thought and perceived reality as well, cutting humanity off from its original participation in the natural and supernatural worlds, isolating us and our concepts from the living universe, eroding belief. (1991, pp. 45-46)

Tolkien and Lewis shared Owen Barfield's vision in what concerns language as a means to produce a reality, and poetic language is the supreme quality language can achieve, the means to create new realities freed from the constraints of dualism and more precisely from positivism and evolutionism that dominated the intellectual world since the end of the 19th century.

For the researchers that investigated fairy stories before Tolkien, like Dasent or Max Muller, for instance, myth and legend were the lowest form of communication, that of primitive humanity. Tolkien, Lewis and Barfield in their essays attempt to rescue myth from the lowest position where their predecessors had left it some time before. Both Tolkien in "On Fairy-Stories" (1983d, p. 117) and Barfield *Poetic Diction* and *Speaker's meaning* (1967, p. 87; 1987, p. 89) refute Muller's statement that myth is a "disease of language"[18].

Concluding this section, one may say that it is true that Tolkien wrote fiction and poetry for children. However, his position against the adaptation of traditional narratives, the expurgation of elements considered as nefarious and the systematic use of a paternalist tone, is the outcome of his aesthetic vision combined with his unwillingness to write narratives for children outside the family context. Tolkien wants to and does justify his predilection for the marvellous, fantasy, myth and non-realistic fiction because his ambition is to read and write narratives that plunge their roots deeply in the ancestry of myth, recovering a richer sense of reality. His ambition is to create fictional worlds different from the real one, though highly coherent, places where the reader does not have to willingly suspend his/her disbelief, due to the immersion in the fictional world that must be able to provide aesthetic satisfaction but also recovery of a more comprehensive concept of reality.

To do this, Tolkien has to recreate ancient canons, reinvent language's symbolic and connotative extent, the poetic dimension fully embedded in the fictional texture.

3. Fairy-Stories and the contemporary conception of fictional worlds

In what way does "On Fairy-Stories" contribute, *avant la lettre*, to narrative theory? That is the question this section will address.

There are almost as many definitions of narratology as there are theoretical researchers. For the sake of clarity and conciseness, let us use excerpts of Mieke Bal's definition:

> Narratology is the ensemble of theories of narratives,

[17] See Carpenter(1997).

[18] Fairy-stories being an offspring of ancient myths and legends are, for Muller and his followers, a degraded, unworthy literature, therefore "proper for less developed minds, as those of children".

> narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artifacts that 'tell a story.' […] a text is a finite, structured whole composed of signs. These can be linguistic units, such as words and sentences, but they can also be different signs, such as cinematic shots and sequences, or painted dots, lines, and blots. The finite ensemble of signs does not mean that the text itself is finite, for its meanings, effects, functions, and background are not. It only means that there is a first and a last word to be identified; a first and a last image of a film; a frame of a painting, even if those boundaries […] are provisional and porous. (2009, pp. 3-4)

Let us focus on the infinitude of meanings, effects, functions and background. Returning to Tolkien's text, one finds more or less the same idea but expressed in a much more poetic form that adds an element missing in Bal's quotation - immersion:

> Faërie contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the sea, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted. (1983d, p. 113)

The text, the weaving of the words, the signs are finite, but the fictional worlds that are created through them, that particular weaving is infinite. Because it feeds on reason but also the imagination, on reality as much as on conjecture, and its vastness depends on the writer and reader's imaginative ability, the rational connections he/she makes and on the dimension of each individual library. This "individual library" can be defined as the personal repository of everything a person has read, experienced, the feelings and their imprints in memory as well as in his/her personality and psychology. It is in all this that resides a relative infinitude of the meanings of the text (Eco, 1992b)[19].

Narratology focusses on several areas, but in this chapter, two main domains will be considered, though they are interconnected. Following Ryan's definition, one will consider the "fictional worlds" and the "storyworlds"[20] with a particular focus on the first due to its core definition - the ontological nature of fictional worlds -, because it goes directly to one of Tolkien's central thesis: the ontological legitimacy of Fairy-Stories.

The idea of possible worlds originated in Leibniz's philosophy and developed in the 20th century in modal philosophy was integrated into literary studies during the "narrative turn" by several authors from which one seems particularly relevant in the case of Tolkien's theory - Lubomír Doležel (1998, 2010)

After being expurgated of the theological dimension it necessarily had in Leibniz's formulation, the fundamental premise of possible worlds is that

> Actuality is, as it were, surrounded by an infinite realm of possibilities. Or, as we might otherwise put it, our actual world is surrounded by an infinity of other possible worlds. (Bradley & Swartz, 1979, p. 2)

This premise, as Bradley and Swartz's explain, is not confined in the realm of philosophy, rather it reflects itself in every human activity, including cultural artefacts, and literature is a cultural product, as all arts are.

> Whatever the historical facts happen to be, we can always suppose- *counterfactually*, as we say - that they might have been otherwise. We constantly make such suppositions in the world of real life. The world of fiction needs no special indulgence. We easily can, and daily do, entertain all sorts of unactualized possibilities about past, present, and future. We think about things that *might* have happened, *might* be happening and *might* be about to happen. Not only do we ruefully ask "What if things *had been* thus and thus?"; we also wonder "What if things *are* so and so?" and "What if things *were to be* such and such?" Counterfactual supposition is not mere idle speculation. Neither is it just a fancy of the dreamer or a refuge for the escapist. (1979, p. 1)[21]

Bradley and Swartz's mention of "the refuge for the escapist" immediately draws one's attention to Tolkien's core function of fantasy literature to which he dedicates a substantial part of the essay:

> Though fairy-stories are of course by no means the only medium of Escape, they are today one of the most obvious and (to some) outrageous forms of 'escapist' literature […]. I have claimed that Escape is one of the main functions of fairy-stories, and since I do not disapprove of them, it is plain that I do not accept the tone of scorn or pity with which 'Escape' is so often used. […] In what the misusers of Escape are fond of calling Real Life, escape is evidently as a rule very practical, and may even be heroic. In real life it is difficult to blame it, unless it fails; in criticism it would seem to be worse the better it succeeds. Evidently we are faced by a misuse of words, and also a confusion of thought. […] The world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it. [The critics] confuse the escape of the prisoner with the flight of the deserter. (1983d, pp. 147-148)

When Tolkien refers to the prisoner escaping prison by imaging being "in another world" he stresses that the possible worlds are a mental construction accessed through language. They are possible worlds, not actual (to use the philosophical terminology), that, however, obey basic logical rules plus the modal logical rules of possibility and necessity (Doležel, 1998, 2010).

More recently, in literary criticism, one reads that,

[19] For further information on immersion produced by literary texts and narratives in other media see Ryan (2015a, pp. 60-114).

[20] For a clear (and short) definition of both terms and their meanings the reading of Ryan's "Texts, Worlds, Stories"(2015b) is a good introduction, with a useful bibliography.

[21] Italics in the original text.

as Tolkien suggests, the creation of fictional worlds (being mythical, fantasy or "realistic") is an innate activity in every human being, necessary and aiming evolution (Wolf, 2013, p. 4). Norman Holland (2009), quoting a study by the psychologists John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, exposes the essential aspects of fictional construction, common to all individuals and taken to a higher degree of artistic and aesthetic quality only by some:

> 1. The ability to "simulate" situations (to imagine them without acting on them) has great value for humans both in survival and reproduction. This ability to simulate seems to occur innately in the human species. We evolved the "association cortices" in our large frontal lobes for just this purpose.
>
> 2. All cultures create fictional, imagined worlds. We humans find these imagined worlds intrinsically interesting.
>
> 3. Responding to imaginary worlds, we engage emotion systems while disengaging action systems (a key point in this book).
>
> 4. Humans have *evolved special cognitive systems that enable us to participate in these fictional worlds*. We can, in short, pretend and deceive and imagine, having mental states about mental states.
>
> 5. We can separate these fictional worlds from our real-life experiences. We can, in a key word, *decouple* them. (2009, pp. 327-328)[22]

Comparing these items to Tolkien's essay, in particular, one cannot but acknowledge that all Tolkien major ideas are embodied in these four points. Fictional worlds have the inner consistency of reality provided by logic and strengthened by the reader's immersion in them through the engagement of his/her emotional system. Furthermore, due to the incompleteness inherent to all fictional worlds (unlike those considered by modal logic), the reader is summoned to complete the fictional world using his knowledge of the actual world.

In 1939/1947, Tolkien expresses the four items quoted above, using the short theoretical lexicon available complemented with a skilful choice of words:

> *Fantasy is a natural human activity*. It certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason, and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity. On the contrary. *The keener and the clearer is the reason, the better fantasy will be make*. […] For creative fantasy is founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun; *on a recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it*. (1983d, p. 144)[23]

Tolkien further states that "fantasy is made out of the Primary World" (1983d, p. 147), and the same does Doležel in 1989, when he states that in order to create a fictional world the author has to build on the only world he/she knows – the actual world (2010, p. 233)

The fictional worlds have necessarily rules and laws, most of them exposed by the characters that have the function of establishing the dimension of truth in that world. Frequently, particularly in fantasy, there is at least one character as ignorant of the fictional world as the reader, and it is through the identification with such a character that the reader comes to terms with the fictional truth, which may be false in the actual world.

The long debate of the concept of truth in fictional worlds is centred on the question: Is it true what one finds in the fictional worlds? [24] The answer is simple: Yes! It is today's theory accepted by narratological studies, and Tolkien wrote it in 1939/1947.

> Probably every writer making a secondary world, a fantasy […] wishes in some measure to be a real maker, or hopes that he is drawing on reality: hopes that the peculiar quality of this secondary world (if not in all details) are derived from Reality, or are flowing into it. If he indeed achieves a quality that can fairly be described […] [as] 'inner consistency of reality', it is difficult to conceive how this can be, if the work does not partake of reality. […] Fantasy can thus be explained as a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth. This is […] an answer to that question, 'Is it true?' The answer to this question […] [is]: 'If you have built your little world well, yes: it is true in that world'. (1983d, p. 155)[25]

[22] Italics in the original text.

[23] Italics added.

[24] Ryan summarises the long debate in her essay "Possible Worlds" using Lewis article "Truth in Fiction"(1978) as departure: "This analysis has important consequences for literary theory for the following reasons: (1) it regards statements about fiction as capable of truth and falsity, against the formerly prevalent views among philosophers that they are either false (for lack of referent) or indeterminate; (2) it assumes that the real world serves as a model for the mental construction of fictional storyworlds; but (3) it does not limit the fictional text to an imitation of reality, maintaining, on the contrary, that texts are free to construct fictional worlds that differ from AW. Readers imagine fictional worlds as the closest possible to AW, and they only make changes that are mandated by the text. For instance, if a fiction mentions a winged horse, readers will imagine a creature that looks like real world horses in every respect except for the fact that this creature has wings. Ryan (1992) calls this interpretive rule 'the principle of minimal departure,' and Walton (1990) calls it 'the reality principle.'" (2013, paragraph 6).

[25] This quotation is taken from the final pages of the essay; many pages before Tolkien had made a similar statement: "[the writer] makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little

One may replace the mentioned "horse with wings" (see note 25) for a hobbit, and the reader will be guided to imagine a human(ish) being, short and usual paunchy, but with big furry feet. The reality of such a hobbit is unquestionable in the world of Middle Earth, though non-existent in the actual world. In Tolkien's fictional world, the hobbits have the same degree of reality as the golden and silvery leaves of LothLórien trees or the Riders of Rohan. It is either the narrator's or reliable characters' performative statements that build the possible/"secondary" world with the reader's collaboration.

4. A provisional conclusion to an inevitably incomplete analysis

It is this author's *fado*, shared unquestionably by many researchers of Tolkien's work, to have to put an end to an analysis that has to leave without mentioning many untouched lines of research.

Nowadays, researchers no longer debate the "reality" of the fictional worlds, their lack of reference, and their philosophical non-existence. Neither are they confined to dedicate their research to "mimetic fiction" as the only genre worth studying. The literary quality of a text does not depend on its closeness to a consensual notion of reality.

As Ryan states:

> In this age of ubiquitous images, fantasy worlds are visually more attractive than realistic worlds. They are the product of a gift of invention that has too long been ignored by literary critics, who tend to privilege writing skills over the art of world-creation. And finally, most fantasy worlds implement reassuring, through stereotypical archetypal plots in which the good guys always triumph over the bad guys after being tested to their limits. Suffering is part of life, these narratives tell us, but it is never in vain. (2017, p. 11)

It was not so in academia when Tolkien wrote both his fiction and his theoretical texts. It is true that his essay "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics" changed the way the poem and medieval literature was studied. The essay "On Fairy-Stories" had to battle against much stronger opposition, that had many strong foundations, such as, for instance, E.M. Forster's 1927 *Aspects of the novel* (1985), Leavis' 1948 *The Great Tradition* (1972) or Auerbach's 1946 *Mimesis: the representation of reality in Western literature* (Auerbach, 2003).

This chapter aimed to point out some of the most unmistakeably innovative theoretical statements that definitely might have placed a then-minor literary art – Fantasy – on the same level as all other praised literary texts. He wrote before the academia was able to understand what he meant. "On Fairy-Stories" took more than half a century to become the theoretical output for a systematic study of fantasy literature. Moreover, even then, academia needed the confirmation provided by other scientific studies from such areas as philosophy, psychology, anthropology cognitive sciences, to take the necessary steps.

To read "On Fairy-Stories" is almost like reading typical Tolkienian prose, full of double meanings, suggested images of distant landscapes glimpsed from a distance. As all other Tolkien's works, "On Fairy-Stories" escapes conclusive readings or interpretations. Nevertheless,

> "On Fairy-Stories" is Tolkien's defining study of and the centre-point in his thinking about a genre, as well as being the theoretical basis for his fiction. Thus it is both the essential and natural companion to his fiction. (Flieger & Anderson, 2014b, p. 9)

Acknowledgement:
This chapter had the support of CHAM (NOVA FCSH/UAc), through the strategic project sponsored by FCT (UID/HIS/04666/2019)

Bibliographical References

Auerbach, Erich. (2003). *Mimesis: the representation of reality in Western literature* (50th-anniversary ed. Translated from the German by Willard R. Trask; with a new introduction by Edward W. Said. 1st ed. 1946). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Bal, Mieke. (2009). *Narratology: introduction to the theory of narrative* (3ª ed). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Barfield, Owen. (1967). *Speaker's meaning*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

---. (1987). *Poetic diction: a study in meaning* (3rd ed. ed). Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press.

Barthes, Roland. (1989). *The rustle of language* (Richard Howard, Trans.). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Bradley, Raymond, & Swartz, Norman. (1979). *Possible worlds: an introduction to logic and its philosophy*. (pp. xxi, 391 p.). Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co.

Carpenter, Humphrey. (1978). *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography*. Londres: George Allen and Unwin.

---. (1997). *The Inklings: C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams and their Friends*. London: HarperCollins.

Curry, Patrick. (1998). *Defending Middle-Earth: Tolkien: myth and modernity*. London: HarperCollins.

Dasent, George Webbe (Ed.) (1859). *Popular Tales from the Norse: With an introductory essay on the Origin and Diffusion of Popular Tales* (2nd enlarged ed.). Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas.

Doležel, Lubomír. (1998). *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

---. (2010). Possible Worlds and Literary Fictions. In Sture Allén (Ed.), *Possible Worlds in Humanities, Arts, and Sciences: Proceedings of Nobel Symposium 6* (pp.

abortive Secondary World from outside" (1983d, p. 132).

221-242). Berlin: W. de Gruyter.
Eco, Umberto. (1979). *The role of the reader: explorations in the semiotics of texts*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
---. (1990). *The limits of interpretation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
---. (1992a). Between author and text. In *Interpretation and overinterpretation* (pp. 69-88). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
---. (1992b). Overinterpreting texts. In Umberto Eco & Stefan Collini (Eds.), *Interpretation and overinterpretation* (pp. 45-66). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
---. (1994). *Six walks in the fictional woods*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
Flieger, Verlyn. (1991). The Sound of Silence: Language and Experience in *Out of the Silent Planet*. In Peter J Schakel & Charles Huttar (Eds.), *Word and Story in C. S. Lewis* (pp. 42-57). Columbia: University of Missouri Press.
---. (2017). *There would always be a fairy tale: more essays on Tolkien*. Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press.
Flieger, Verlyn, & Anderson, Douglas. (2014a). The History of "On Fairy-Stories". In *On Fairy-Stories* (pp. 122-158). London: HarperCollins.
---. (2014b). Introduction. In Verlyn Flieger & Douglas Anderson (Eds.), *On Fairy-Stories* (pp. 9-23). London: HarperCollins.
Forster, E. M. (1985). *Aspects of the novel*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
Holland, Norman Norwood. (2009). *Literature and the brain*. Gainesville: The PsyArt Foundation.
Kreiswirth, Martin. (2005). Narrative Turn in the Humanities. In David Herman & Marie-Laure Ryan (Eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (pp. 377-382). London: Routledge.
Leavis, F. R. (1972). *The Great Tradition*. Londres: Penguin Books.
Lewis, C. S. (1973). New Learning and New Ignorance. In Kenneth Allott & Norman Davis (Eds.), *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
---. (1988). *Letters of C. S. Lewis* (Walter Hooper Ed. Rev. and enl. ed. With a memoir by W.H. Lewis). London: HarperCollins.
--- (Ed.) (1947). *Essays presented to Charles Williams*. London: Oxford University Press.
Lewis, David. (1978). Truth in Fiction. *American Philosophical Quarterly, 15* (1), 37-46. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20009693. doi:10.2307/20009693.
Michelson, Paul E. (2012). The Development of J. R. R. Tolkien's Ideas on Fairy-Stories. *Inklings Forever, 8*, 1-11.
Monteiro, Maria do Rosário. (1992). *J. R. R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings; A Viagem e a Transformação*. Lisboa: INIC. Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/10362/14067
---. (1993). Númenor: Tolkien's literary Utopia. *History of European Ideas, 16* (4-6), 633-638. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0191-6599(93)90199-Z. doi:10.1016/0191-6599(93)90199-Z.
---. (1997). *A Simbólica do Espaço nos Mundos Fantásticos Neo-Românticos: Análise Comparativa das Obras The Lord of the Rings e Earthsea.* (PhD in Comparative Literature), Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, Lisbon.
---. (2000). As Viagens nos Mares Fantásticos de Middle-earth e Earthsea: A Busca da Identidade e o Confronto com o Outro. In Isabel Allegro de MAGALHÃES (Ed.), *Literatura e Pluralidade Cultural* (pp. 915-922). Lisboa: Edições Colibri.
---. (2010). *A Simbólica do Espaço em O Senhor dos Anéis, de J. R. R. Tolkien*. Viana do Castelo: Livros de Areia. Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/10362/14314
---. (2014). *Heroes in The Lord of the Rings: Tradition and Modernity*. Paper presented at the International Conference Worlds made of Heroes. Plenary Session. University of Porto.
---. (2015). *Ainulindalë; Criação e Ordenação do Caos na Obra de Tolkien*. Paper presented at the 1º Congresso de História e Mitologia Lisbon.
Noad, Charles E. (2000). On the Construction of *The Silmarillion*. In Verlyn Flieger & Carl F. Hostettler (Eds.), *Tolkien's Legendarium; Essays on the History of Middle-earth* (pp. 31-68). Westport: Greenwood Press.
O'Neill, Timothy. (1980). *The Individuated Hobbit: Jung, Tolkien and the Archetypes of Middle-earth* (2ª ed). Londres: Thames and Hudson.
Pavel, Thomas. (1986). *Fictional Worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
---. (1988). *Univers de la Fiction*. Paris: Editions du Seuil.
Pearce, Joseph. (1998). *Tolkien: Man and Myth*. Londres: HarperCollins.
Ryan, Marie-Laure. (1992). *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
---. (2011). Meaning, intent, and the implied author. *Style, 45* (1), 29-47. http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA258993716&v=2.1&u=wash89460&it=r&p=ITOF&sw=w. (2012/7/10/).
---. (2013, 27. September 2013). Possible Worlds. The living handbook of narratology. Retrieved from http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/possible-worlds.
---. (2015a). *Narrative as virtual reality 2: revisiting immersion and interactivity in literature and electronic media* (2nd revised ed). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
---. (2015b). Texts, Worlds, Stories: Narrative Worlds as Cognitive and Ontological Concept. In Mari Hatavera, Matti Hyvärinen, Maria Mäkelä, & Frans Mäyrä (Eds.), *Narrative Theory, Literature, and New Media: Narrative Minds and Virtual Worlds* (pp. 13-28). London: Routledge.
---. (2017). Why Worlds Now? In Mark J. P. Wolf (Ed.), *Revisiting Imaginary Worlds* (pp. 3-13). London: Routledge.
. Thomas the Rhymer. (1912). In Arthur Thomas QUILLER-COUCH (Ed.), *The Oxford Book of English Verse, 1250-1900* (pp. 400-403). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Tolkien, J. R. R. (1981a). *Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* (Humphrey Carpenter Ed. A selection edited by Humphrey Carpenter with the assistance of Christopher Tolkien). London: George Allen & Unwin.
---. (1981b). *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* (Humphrey Carpenter Ed.). London: George Allen and Unwin.
---. (1983a). Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics. In Christopher Tolkien (Ed.), *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays* (pp. 5-48). Londres: George Allen and Unwin.
---. (1983b). *The Hobbit: Or There and Back Again* (4th ed.

1ª ed. 1937). Londres: Unwin Paperbacks.
---. (1983c). *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays* (Christopher Tolkien Ed.). Londres: George Allen and Unwin.
---. (1983d). On Fairy-Stories. In Christopher Tolkien (Ed.), *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays* (pp. 109-161). London: George Allen and Unwin.
---. (1983e). *The Silmarillion* (Christopher Tolkien Ed. 3rd ed. 1ª ed. 1977). Londres: Unwin Paperbacks.
---. (1983-1996). *The History of Middle-earth* (Christopher Tolkien Ed. 12 vols). London: George Allen & Unwin.
---. (2005). *The Lord of the Rings* (50th anniversary 1 vol. ed. 1st ed. 1954-1955). London: HarperCollinsPublishers.
---. (2014). *On Fairy-Stories* (Verlyn Flieger & Douglas Anderson Eds.). London: HarperCollins.
---. (2016). *A Secret Vice* (Dimitra Fimi & Andrew Higgins Eds.). London: HarperCollins.
Walton, Kendall L. (1990). *Mimesis as make-believe: on the foundations of the representational arts*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
Wolf, Mark J. P. (2013). *Building imaginary worlds: the theory and history of subcreation*. New York: Routledge.